

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-22

WASHINGTON POST
18 April 1984

U.S. Hispanics Urged To Back Latin Policy

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President Reagan appealed to Hispanic-American leaders to support his Central American policies yesterday, warning that the Soviet Union is trying to turn the region into a string of dictatorships that threaten all of the Americas.

The president also took some strong swipes at Congress for its refusal to approve additional military aid the administration has requested for Central America and for votes in both houses condemning the CIA for laying mines in Nicaraguan waters.

"America does not exist in a vacuum," he told 150 members of the National Hispanic Leadership Conference. "Today a far-away totalitarian power is committing enormous resources to change the strategic balance of the world by turning Central America into a string of anti-American, Soviet-style dictatorships."

"And when I use the term anti-American, I'm not using it as anti-United States because we're all Americans—from Tierra del Fuego in the south to the North Pole. And it is all of America that this assault is aimed at."

Reagan said Congress must have the political courage to counter the Soviets and not apologize for decisive action.

"We've made an ambitious economic effort in that region . . .," he said, "but economic assistance, as much as some people on Capitol Hill would like to think otherwise, will not overcome the military threat."

He said events in Central

America could be particularly damaging to U.S. border states, home to many Hispanic-Americans, if a new wave of immigrants flee increasing numbers of communist dictatorships.

"There's still time to defend freedom," he said, "but to do so we can't stand as a house divided against itself. We must recognize our common values. We must take a no-nonsense approach to protecting our vital interests."

Reagan also told the Hispanics that he remains committed to bilingual education as well as to strong enforcement provisions for any immigration legislation.

Hispanics have expressed concern over enforcement provisions of one bill approved by the House Judiciary Committee because they fear that penalties for hiring illegal aliens might discourage employers from hiring all Hispanics.

At yesterday's luncheon, the president did not back off from his call for employer sanctions. Instead, without directly mentioning that controversial provision of the immigration bill, he said: "I will insist that any immigration legislation passed by the Congress provides for fair and effective enforcement."

One woman wore a large "Women for Mondale" button at the luncheon. But afterward Olga Mendez, a New York state senator, said Reagan was "charming."

"I'm a Democrat, but after hearing his words I can visualize how Hispanics and other minorities can go with him," she said. "We have to be stoic and separate his policies from the man."